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Viewing cable 06MANAGUA212, NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS REGIONAL REPORTING: RAAN

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06MANAGUA212	2006-01-27 23:30	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Managua

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758456.aspx>
<http://www.nacion.com/2011-05-30/Mundo/NotasSecundarias/Mundo2758467.aspx>
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<http://www.confidencial.com.ni/articulo/3967/barreto-era-ldquo-fuente-confiable-rdquo-para-eeuu>

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/21/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS REGIONAL REPORTING: RAAN
REF: 05 MANAGUA 2938

Classified By: Ambassador Paul Trivelli for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Emboffs visited the North Atlantic Autonomous Region (RAAN) on January 19 to discuss the upcoming March 5 regional elections with political, religious, and NGO officials. Both partisan and independent authorities reported that Eduardo Montealegre is gaining strength in the region by draining support from the PLC and Yatama dissidents angry with their leaders, decision to ally with their historic enemy, the FSLN. APRE leaders claimed that Jose Antonio Alvarado cultivated considerable good will on the Atlantic Coast during his time in government, though APRE did not seem to be as organized as the ALN-PC. Party and NGO leaders again warned of irregularities with the local and regional electoral authorities. End Summary.

WHEN IN ROME: MONTEALEGRE COURTS COAST VOTERS WITH CONCERTS AND HAND OUTS

¶2. (C) On January 19, Emboffs traveled to the RAAN to meet with local leaders and discuss the March regional elections. While visiting the ALN-PC headquarters as they were getting ready for their campaign launch)- the house was bustling with activity -- we saw piles of T-shirts and other paraphernalia. We met more than a dozen ALN-PC council candidates drawn from the ranks of PLC dissidents, the Conservative Party and the Resistance Party. Jaime Chow, coordinator for the ALN-PC in the RAAN and a former founder of the local PLC organization, claimed to have 4,500 poll watchers ready for the elections, or about 10 per voting location, 50% of whom are trained observers. Chow said that he had received \$800,000 to run the RAAN campaign, and that he had spent \$30,000 to stage a performance of the popular musical group "Dimension Costena," which drew 10,000 people. When asked where his funding came from, he admitted that it was all from the national ALN-PC campaign coffers -- "the only local money is drug money," he asserted, and Chow did not want to risk the reputation of the ALN-PC campaign by raising funds in the RAAN. Chow said that Montealegre has already toured the RAAN three times, the most of any presidential candidate.

¶3. (C) Chow claimed that the ALN-PC is receiving considerable support and interest from indigenous Miskitos unhappy with the leadership of Yatama, the traditional indigenous party, who are allying with the FSLN for the national elections. When asked why the ALN-PC had not allied with Pamuc, an indigenous party formed by Yatama dissidents, Chow said that Pamuc leaders wanted the electoral campaign reimbursement funds (distributed by the Supreme Electoral Council after elections according to the percentage of the vote won by each

party) for themselves, which they could not get by joining an alliance. He noted, however, that Pamuc had agreed to support ALN-PC in the national elections.

14. (C) Moravian Church superintendent Stedman Bent and Miskito human rights activist Adan Artola agreed that Montealegre has generated considerable support on the Coast. Bent noted the success of the "Dimension Costena" concert and stated that, in his estimation, Montealegre and the ALN-PC enjoy more support than Jose Antonio Alvarado and APRE and have possibly eclipsed even the corruption-tainted PLC. On the other hand, Bent has not noticed that Herty Lewites has captured many Sandinista votes, noting poor turnout at Lewites' rallies. He also recounted a rumor that Lewites was attacked by FSLN militants in the RAAS capital of Bluefields. Artola agreed that Montealegre has won the "sympathy" of the people by handing out toys to children, hosting meals and staging concerts, while Lewites has failed to make inroads. Artola claimed that Montealegre had recruited the "best candidates" from the pool of Liberal politicians in the RAAN.

15. (SBU) Local NGO leaders (see below) told Emboffs that they have noticed a new voter tendency to select candidates based on their individual track record rather than party affiliation. IPADE director Maria Gradiz reported that Yatama has lost popularity since the municipal elections, while the ALN-PC has gained significant momentum over the last three months, especially following Montealegre's visit to Puerto Cabezas in December.

APRE CAMPAIGN IN DISARRAY

16. (C) The mood was very different at the APRE office (housed in a municipal building). APRE leaders stated that they had emerged as the "third force" in the RAAN after the 2004 municipal elections, but complained that they have no money for the current campaign. When asked about poll watchers, legal advisor Uriel Vanegas replied that the candidates themselves would have to find their own fiscales. When we pushed the issue, party officials admitted that many fiscales had deserted APRE as constituent parties abandoned the Alliance after the 2004 elections.

ELECTORAL COUNCILS FAILING TO ISSUE CEDULAS

17. (C) As usual, most of the people we spoke with professed a lack of confidence in the local and national electoral councils. Jaime Chow reported that 20,000 citizens in the vicinity of Waspam (half the population) are without cedula (national/voter ID card). Chow described these Nicaraguans as "children of the war" who would naturally vote anti-Sandinista. Adan Artola claimed that the regional and municipal electoral councils are "dominated by Sandinistas" and that cedula applicants must convince council bureaucrats that they are Sandinista sympathizers to obtain a cedula. Uriel Vanegas reported that municipal electoral councils (CEMs) have refused to admit APRE magistrates who earned CEM seats after the 2004 municipal elections. (Note: Seats on the CEMs are allocated to political parties based on their percentage of the vote in the last elections. When asked if APRE had presented evidence of discrimination to local or international NGOs, Vanegas admitted that they had not. End Note.)

LOCAL NGO OFFICIALS REGISTER CONCERN REGARDING VOTER ROLL VERIFICATION

18. (SBU) Emboffs met with three NGO leaders in the RAAN to discuss the CSE-sponsored voter roll ("padron") verification process that took place November 24-27 and plans for observation missions for the March 5 regional elections. Maria Alina Gradiz, the regional coordinator for the Institute for Development and Democracy (IPADE), reported that IPADE had observed the padron verification in November and observed very low turnout. In addition to voter apathy and fatigue, Gradiz attributed the poor showing to confusion resulting from a political party membership drive conducted shortly before the verification and a weak civic education

campaign. According to Gradiz, the Atlantic Coast CEMs have historically faced budgetary shortfalls, resulting in the closure of regional offices responsible for producing cédulas and poor training of poll watchers.

¶9. (SBU) Juan Herbacio White, deputy head of the local chapter of *Etica y Transparencia* (ET), also reported that his group observed the padron verification process. Herbacio agreed with Gradiz that voter apathy and a lack of civic education contributed to a low turnout, but he also noted irregularities, such as poll workers leaving the verification tables for 2-3 hour lunch breaks, a lack of information for voters in the Miskito and Creole languages (widely used on the Coast), and voters presenting two cédulas -- their own and one belonging to a dead friend or relative -- and then directed by the CEM officials to "go to the political parties" with the second cédula. Herbacio confirmed allegations in the national press that FSLN candidates have expedited the cedulation process for party militants.

¶10. (SBU) Debby Hodgson, the regional coordinator of the Center for Citizen and Autonomous Rights of the Atlantic Coast (CEDHECA), claimed that several parties, including the FSLN, PLC and Yatama, had facilitated cedulation for their party members. Hodgson also asserted that voters were changing circumscriptions to vote for the candidate of their choice, specifically claiming that 300 FSLN voters changed voting venue to cast ballots for the Sandinista ex-mayor of Bilwi, Guillermo Espinosa. (Comment: Hodgson made no secret of her support for the FSLN, but assured Emboffs that CEDHECA would operate in a non-partisan manner. End Comment.)

¶11. (U) All three groups, IPADE, ET, and CEDHECA, will be fielding teams of observers for the March 5 regional elections.

COMMENT: WILL MONTEALEGRE'S POPULARITY HELP HIS PARTY?

¶12. (C) Both partisan and presumably neutral observers reported growing support for Eduardo Montealegre in the RAAN. This increasing recognition bodes well for Montealegre regarding his chances in the November national elections, but may not directly translate into support for ALN-PC regional council candidates in March. If the ALN-PC fails to make a significant showing in the regional elections, regardless of Montealegre's personal popularity, PLC Liberals could spin the results to argue even more vociferously that the PLC is the only party that can defeat the FSLN -- a strategy that may drain support for Montealegre.

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